

May 2, 2019

Michael O'Connor
President, Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners
120 E. Walnut Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Mr. O'Connor and members of the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners,

Please accept my application for the position of Superintendent of Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). My experiences in education have included all levels of leadership, including currently serving as the Interim Superintendent of IPS. In addition to this role, I have served as a senior district leader, a school leader, a coach of beginning teachers, a teacher leader, and as a teacher. With my experience in each role, I have had the opportunity to continue to build my leadership and management skills along with gaining the unique perspective from each position to inform my work. As an Indianapolis resident for the past 15 years, including nearly four years as a part of our district's leadership team, I have had the opportunity to intimately learn the strengths and opportunities that exist in our district. I am confident that I have the experience, skills, and perspective to lead our district during our next phase of improvement and success for the students we serve.

When one examines the academic performance data of students in our state, city, and district, what immediately becomes evident is the long-standing persistence of opportunity and achievement gaps between white students and students of color as well as more affluent students and students from low-income families. As any attendee of the district's Racial Equity Institute will affirm, these gaps are the result of a system that has not provided the conditions necessary for all students to succeed. I believe it is an issue that must be deeply examined and that it is incumbent upon those of us who are a part of the system to examine our roles and reimagine and advocate for solutions that can serve all of our students. In doing so, we must also confront the reality that there are no silver bullets. There are no easy fixes. There is no one who can fix it for us. It is on us. We are the ones we have been looking for, and I believe that solutions already exist among the people who deeply care about our students, our schools and our community.

My children are IPS students and I have put the education of my children into the hands of our district because I believe that it is not enough to discuss this work in the context of other people's children. It's about my children as well and we are all in this together. As a black woman who is raising black children, it is crushing to know and have real evidence of the ways in which our society—including our educational system—falls short in cultivating the academic growth of black students. I aspire to lead a district in which parents of color can be confident that their children are attending schools where they feel safe, valued and their growth is cultivated every single day. That day has not yet arrived across all of IPS, but I deeply believe that it's possible. Therefore, I would continue to bring to my work every day not only a deeply personal investment in our district, but also my conviction in the possibility of education as the tool to disrupt inequitable systems in our city.

Since 2015, when I became a member of Team IPS, I believe that I have consistently demonstrated my ability to achieve identified goals aligned to my work by setting a strategic vision and executing that vision through building a strong team with high-capacity team members. As the first person to be hired in the district as the Innovation Officer after newly passed state legislation, I built the systems and structures that have become an important part of our district strategy. More importantly, as the work evolved, I was responsive to feedback by building systems that better integrated and included community engagement. Since leveraging this work as one of our strategies for school improvement, we have been able to be the decision-makers about the future of our chronically underperforming schools instead of the state, as had occurred in prior years.

While I did not officially assume the role of Deputy Superintendent for Academics until April 2018, I led the academic initiatives that were a critical part of our Reinventing High School experience which included a complete restructure of our high schools and the revision of multiple Board policies to align with our current strategy. I also took a team that had experienced turnover in leadership and transformed that group into a much healthier and aligned team—a necessary condition in order to be the most impactful for students.

In the last four months as Interim Superintendent, I believe that I have continued to demonstrate my ability to navigate our complex educational landscape, build strong relationships in the community, and establish clear and consistent communication with the Board of School Commissioners so that you are well positioned to make decisions in the best interests of our students and families. In this short time, we have accomplished a great deal. We have raised salaries for district employees—some of whom had not received raises in over ten years. We've created a Family and Community Engagement team that will better support our district in expanding our connections in and with our community. Our Post-Secondary Readiness team has continued to expand its impact—earning nearly a million dollars to support our 3E goals and hosting our first ever Inspire job fair for the 2019 graduating class. Additionally, we have continued to steadily and transparently work toward our commitment to leverage every dollar we receive through our efficiency projects and budget priorities that support our schools in making the very best decisions for their students and families.

It is my goal to bring to fruition the mission of our district: empowering and educating all of students to think critically, creatively, and responsibly, to embrace diversity, and to pursue their dreams with purpose. This mission is only created through high-quality schools and a central services team that provides the enabling conditions for our school teams to best serve their students. As a recently named Future Chief, a part of the nationally recognized Chiefs for Change network of district and state education leaders, I will continue to build my capacity as the superintendent of a large, urban school district. Through my Future Chiefs participation, I will receive leadership development coaching, have the ability to shadow and learn from more veteran superintendents, and have access to a team of leaders who will visit Indianapolis and provide feedback to me on specific strategic priorities. This level of support in my first year as Indianapolis Public Schools Superintendent will be invaluable and serve to accelerate the impact of my leadership along with affording our team with access to additional resources to support our district priorities.

I deeply respect and appreciate the Board of School Commissioners commitment to hearing from our community regarding their hopes for the next superintendent of Indianapolis Public Schools. What was shared in multiple discussions was that community members want a candidate who knows our city and our school district; a candidate who can identify with and represent the diversity of the students we serve; a candidate who has both experience and success in working with students in an urban district. I believe that I am that candidate in that I represent all of those desired qualities. I am passionate about our city, our school district, and the students we serve, but passion alone will not help us achieve the goals we need to reach. Along with my passion, I believe that my professional record, ability for leading change, and improving organizational effectiveness are the leadership skills needed to significantly and positively impact the academic outcomes of our students. I appreciate your consideration of my application, and I look forward to having the opportunity to continue to build on the work we've done together as a team thus far.

Sincerely,

Aleesia Johnson